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Statement submitted by World Union of Small and Medium Enterprises, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the Expanding Influence of the Female Entrepreneur

Today — and in both the near and distant future — the success and influence of small and medium-sized enterprises mandates that people open their minds to new possibilities, perspectives and, in many ways, to unknown economic factors. To build successful workplace models, we need to look at the players, explore bold new ideas, implement sweeping gender-centric changes, imagine new worlds, and, more than that, we might do what has never been done before.

We can no longer afford to let time slip through our hands without recognising and taking full advantage of the contributions and positive influence being generated by female entrepreneurs. To do this effectively, it is imperative that we understand that their required collaboration will necessitate support mechanisms that are going to differ, in some respects, from those that were put in place, and which have been enjoyed for so many years, by their male counterparts.

Statistics prove that small and medium-sized enterprises are laden with men and women possessing the skills and talents necessary to operate them successfully. Small and medium-sized enterprises growth, overall, has allowed participation of men and women to the extent that they can make their own career choices. It should be obvious that those currently and actively involved in small and medium-sized enterprises — both men and women - has changed dimensions in size and character as well. Sadly, however — and on a global basis — virtually all cultures appear to have an enormous blind spot regarding seeing the obvious when it comes to female entrepreneurs.

Approximately 50 per cent of the world's population is female and the opportunity to run one's own business is equally appealing to both genders. 126 million small and medium-sized enterprises worldwide are run by women, and that number is taking into consideration, only those businesses that are registered. There are many millions more — micro enterprises and crafts — that go unregistered because they are run out of the owner's home. These low-echelon businesses are primarily owned and operated by women. Both size and gender play a part in denying such businesses access to part of the networks, including such things as funding and the establishment of cross border trading connections.

Apart from observing how we have addressed small and medium-sized enterprises issues in general, over the last decade or two, we must start to leverage the rising numbers of women in business and consider the rapidly changing needs of both men and women as both business people and consumers. We need to factor in the diverse qualities and talents of all genders, across the world, in terms of how they impact commerce, consumer power and lifestyle demands.

The world is changing rapidly, with women creating a growing influence on a world that needs to embrace or, at the very least, implement a growing sensitivity toward providing for both family and community needs.

In the corporate world, it should much easier to be on a level playing field.

Women bring an entire range of new talents that are not only desirable but necessary for commercial success today. We need to open our eyes to the feminine values that empowers both men and women to appreciate the ways in which women add their unique outlook, talents and leadership skills to small and medium-sized enterprises growth, whether running their businesses on their own or in partnership with men.

We can experience that, where women have an entrepreneurial mind set, the potential to achieve great things is limitless. These emerging women entrepreneurs:

- display self-confidence in their performance,
- know how to effectively leverage any situation, and
- develop an enhanced potential for successful leadership, whether in an all-male, all-female or mixed gender environment.

We need to neutralize gender biased roadblocks and eliminate preconceived biases that genuinely exist regarding working effectively and collaboratively between different genders. Mixed teams, now, are well evidenced to be the most creative, productive and effective — whether led by men and women — when using feminine values.

Recognising the potential changes inherent in applying feminine leadership dynamics, it is mandatory that the appropriate development of women needs to be seen through a new lens; through a much broader, yet balanced, gender dynamic lens. Only then it is possible to ensure that authentic gender awareness produces the transformational influence necessary to modify, or create, a completely new workplace culture for small and medium-sized enterprises or global economy in general. There is no end of talent, but we may be making the mistake of looking at it as an end-result as opposed to planting the seeds of growth.

Given observations and studies of groups of female entrepreneurs actively involved in the small, medium and micro enterprise business sector, it is apparent that females seek success in ways that clearly have the potential to grow and flourish regardless of their stage in life. Of greater interest, is the fact that men are increasingly following the same line preferred by women, and so we see different types of men and women impacting the nature of effective small and medium-sized enterprises operation. The dynamic of feminine versus masculine traits and talents — in both men and women — when put under the microscope as tasks versus relationships, can determine the difference between success and failure. It is now more noticeable that the growing number of women in the small and medium-sized enterprises sector is impacting even the base understanding of the fluid nature of entrepreneurship, in that men too are likely to use historically recognized feminine values of collaboration, mutuality, genuine dialogue, shared feelings and transparency, which are essential elements of entrepreneurial success. It is a more relationship, trust based and service-oriented style which results in a more sustainable result with the added beneficial impact on the family and the larger community.

These values are now recognized as the most effective in achieving long term success and fulfilment. There are many studies that look at the feminine values principle across corporate and small and medium-sized enterprises markets. The same has also been studied extensively by McKinseys over ten years. It is titled "Women Matter," and it has been quoted in many research studies, such as the Ketchum Leadership Communication Monitor. This feminine-values leadership style is being used by both genders and has effectively proved, over a decade, to return greater and more sustainable profits and long-term growth. Further data detailed in The Athena Doctrine shares how women and wise men are running the world more effectively.

It is also important to note that most of the retail consumers today are female. We need to be aware not only of the growth of female entrepreneurs, and the increasingly adopted feminine style of leadership, but also the sheer power of the female consumer, means it is wise to take notice of the issue's women have with economic parity. Female small and medium-sized enterprises owners are establishing themselves and becoming deeply and significantly embedded in small and medium-sized enterprises culture. It just makes good business sense to recognize that women

are taking the lead alongside men. This is the prevailing wisdom about collaboration, leading with authenticity, and genuinely caring about both employees and customers. We must breed mutual trust between and among men and women. It is thoroughly documented that the best team is mixed-gender and that the resulting co-creation is changing the economic landscape profoundly and forever.

Our challenge, then, is to evaluate and understand all these elements separately and together:

- The changing workplace at home and in our communities;
- the rise of women in entrepreneurial business;
- small and medium-sized enterprises growth overall;
- fast paced technology evolution;
- scalability and economic prosperity, and most importantly;
- instilling feminine values that underpin a more sustainable growth curve benefiting not the few, but the many.

The World Union of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (WUSME) is committed to monitoring these areas and identifying suitable spaces and favourable conditions for the commitment of women entrepreneurs to be rewarded, bringing greater prosperity to the community.